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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000981

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: FM ON UPCOMING MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: NEXT STEPS

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a March 19 meeting with PolCouns, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari reported he has been in contact with his counterparts of those countries who attended the March 10 Neighbors Conference. Plans for the upcoming April Ministerial have stalled due to the Prime Minister's insistence that the conference occur in Iraq. Zebari explained the PM is concerned that if the conference is held outside of Iraq it will "internationalize" Iraq's issues and possibly lead some countries to believe they have the right to dictate Iraq's policies. While Egypt and Turkey have offered to host the conference, Zebari suggested Kuwait as a potential option since they will be viewed by the PM and Shia coalition as less likely to interfere in the agenda or participants. On working groups, Zebari has sent a letter to neighboring Foreign Ministers notifying them of the working group structure and identifying who is participating in the groups on security cooperation and coordination; Iraqi refugees and migrants; and fuel and energy supplies. Absent from the letter, however, was a date or location as to when the working groups should meet. Iraq will lead each group and will present the committees' findings and recommendations at the Ministerial conference. END SUMMARY.

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THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: PM PUSHING FOR IRAQ TO HOST  
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¶2. (C) Zebari noted that the Prime Minister wants the Ministerial conference in Iraq. However, he continued, neighboring foreign ministers have "advised" the GOI not to insist a venue inside Iraq. If the GOI insists on hosting, Zebari said, it could undermine the achievements from the March 10 conference. Zebari said he has told the Prime Minister that the GOI does not have the capacity to host an expanded conference that would include G-8 participation, although he acknowledged that it would be possible to have this type of conference in Erbil. The problem, he continued, is that the Prime Minister and the Shia political parties fear that an expanded conference will lead to "internationalizing" Iraq and result in other countries dictating how Iraq should handle problems or make decisions.

¶3. (C) The PM is especially concerned that Egypt might have an agenda contrary to the GOI and use hosting a conference as an opportunity to impose resolutions or policies upon Iraq. Similarly, the PM remains uncomfortable with Turkey's offer to host. The Iranians, he said, are also pushing the United Iraqi Alliance, the Shia political party coalition, to have the next conference in Iraq. Further complicating the issue, neighboring foreign ministers have questioned the proposal to have one conference in Egypt for Iraq's neighbors followed by an expanded conference in Turkey. They are suggesting that there should only be one, expanded conference, Zebari explained

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THE PM MUST MAKE A DECISION SO PLANS CAN MOVE FORWARD

14. (C) Zebari said he told the PM that he needs to make a decision so that a clear plan can be developed and preparations can begin. The PM responded that the issue will be referred to the Policy Council for National Security (PCNS) although not all of its members are currently in Iraq and there is no date for the next meeting. Zebari lamented that by referring the decision to the PCNS it is effectively killing momentum for the ministerial-level conference.

KUWAIT AS ALTERNATE LOCATION; GOI TO SET THE AGENDA

15. (C) The FM then told PolCouns that his compromise solution is to have Kuwait host the conference, describing Kuwait as non-threatening to the GOI and a palatable alternative. In conversations with the Kuwaitis, he said, they have agreed to host the conference, although it remains uncertain whether the Kuwaitis would remain agreeable if the Egyptians and Turks continue to lobby to host. Regardless of where the conference occurs, the FM said, the GOI will be responsible for setting the agenda and determining the participants, both at the Ministerial conference and the working group meetings.

16. (C) Polcouns emphasized the Secretary's commitment to the Ministerial conference and the need for it to occur in April. Zebari agreed that an April date remains feasible as long as the PM quickly makes key decisions.

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS CHOSEN, DATE FOR MEETINGS UNCLEAR

17. (C) When asked about the working groups decided upon at BAGHDAD 00000981 002 OF 002

the March 10 Neighbors Conference, Zebari said he recently sent letters to his Foreign Minister counterparts. In these letters, Zebari identified the again the three working groups: security cooperation and coordination; Iraqi refugees and migrants; and fuel and energy supplies. According to the letter, the GOI will lead each committee which will be comprised of technical experts from each of the participating countries. Zebari has left open the possibility that experts from non-neighboring countries might also be included, although that will be up to the GOI. The recommendations and findings that the committees produce will be presented at the Ministerial conference. While the letter sent to the Foreign Ministers expressed hope that all would send representatives to the upcoming meetings, Zebari did not identify a date for the working groups to meet or determine where the meetings would occur.

18. (C) For the security cooperation and coordination committee Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iran will participate. The Iraqi refugee and migrant committee contains Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, the UN High Commission for Refugees and the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Kuwait and Iran are the members for the fuel and energy supplies committee. KHALILZAD